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In Memoriam Martha Jewell Crombie

By Charles S. Macfarland



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IN MEMORIAM.

Sunday Morning, March 15, 1903.



ALL in the finite that is good and true is but the clothing, in an earthly dress, of infinite and unseen things. Thus do the heavens declare the Father's glory, the sunlight is the shining of his countenance, and the music of the spheres the utterance of holy love.

The loving Ruler of the whole creation guides it, not from afar, but ever in its midst, and speaks, on every hand, to hearts that wait and listen, and reveals Himself to eyes that seek to see Him in the things about us.

The science of the Infinite is not best read in books, but seen in life.

Our lovèd Quaker poet has expressed the fundamental truth of our religious faith in terms of simple human lore :

"I fain would see
How Three are One and One is Three."

He wanders forth in sun and air, and as he meditates, he feels

"A presence melted through his mood,
A warmth, a light, a sense of good,
Like sunshine through a winter wood."

He walks among the streets of busy men, and that same Spirit vests itself in garments of our human life.

“He saw that presence, mailed complete
In her white innocence, pause to greet
A fallen sister of the street.

“Upon her bosom snowy pure
The lost one clung, as if secure
From inward guilt or outward lure.

“But still he prayed, ‘Lord, let me see
How Three are One and One is Three?’

“Then something whispered, ‘Dost thou pray
For what thou hast? This very day
The Holy Three have crossed thy way.

“‘Did not the gifts of sun and air
To good and ill alike declare
The all-compassionate Father’s care?

“‘In the white soul that stooped to raise
The lost one from her evil ways,
Thou saw’st the Christ, whom angels praise!

“‘A bodiless Divinity,
The still, small Voice that spake to thee
Was the Holy Spirit’s mystery!

“‘Revealed in love and sacrifice,
The Holiest passed before thine eyes,
One and the same, in threefold guise.

“‘The equal Father in rain and sun,
His Christ in the good to evil done,
His voice in thy soul; — and the Three are One!’

“And his heart answered, ‘Lord, I see
How Three are One, and One is Three!’”

One meaning of the poet's dream is this: The Father has revealed Himself, not only in the morning stars, not only in a written Book, but in the hearts and lives of human children. In the beauty and the sacrifice of human personalities.

And while 'tis true that the complete revealment of his Father's character and holy will was in his Son two thousand years ago, theophanies did not begin, nor did they end, at Bethlehem.

The darkness of our human life has ever been dispelled by light from heaven in the souls of good and holy men and women. The message from the Father's heart has come through human lips, and the Father's love revealed itself in human lives.

As the older messages of Holy Writ have told us of their time, so in all time, God has put on the personalities of men and sought to do his work of grace through them.

Far better than the sense of God in hill and vale, in sun and star, and all the beauties of the world in which we live, far better than inspired written Page, is the inspired heart which touches close our own in common paths of daily life, whose very garment carries healing in its touch.

Yes, God has touched life in many ways, reveals himself in varied forms; through far-off prophets and apostles, through tables of his holy Law, but in a nearer way, through humble men and women in our very midst.

The Saviour told his twelve that the incarnate Spirit in Himself was not for Him alone. He said the message of the Father's and his lips must be repeated o'er by other human tongues; the errands of his mercy done by human feet, and that the light of God to a dark world must shine through other human faces than his own. I am the light of the world, said He—and so are ye. The Father hath sent Me—and I send you. The incarnation was for them as well as for their Lord.

Now this is true. Something of God we learn from everything. Something from nature's voice and smile. Something from a holy Book. Something from the spoken truth. And more through touch with the invisible and eternal Christ.

But revelation has not here its final end. It may be oftener than these, it comes through good and pure and holy lives close by our side, in intimacy with our daily life, which, more than they knew and more than we have thought, have spoke to us God's thoughts, have ministered to us his grace, and showed to us his heart and life.

Is it not true? The peace of God has come. Did it not come by the quiet touch of some calm, human hand? The tenderness and sympathy of God have come to soothe our sorrows. Was it not by the human lips of some loving child of God on earth? Have not our fears been driven by the reassuring voice from some strong, human heart? The tears of human sorrow have been wiped away by the Father's hand, but was it not the loving hand of some human child of his? Is it not almost always so?

I think if we should trace the better life that lived itself in all men down through these two thousand years, that we should find men have not, in most part, gained it by access without mediation, but while all would lead to Christ, it nearly all has come by other men and women, who, like Him and following Him, have been the mediators between Him and his loved brethren. We all, I think, are led to God by human hearts and hands.

We seldom know the meaning of diviner things and qualities by any other means. We learn what love is when we see a loving woman. We see the beauty of self-sacrifice in those who sacrifice themselves. We see the truth most clearly in true men. And by them, if we will, we may be led to heaven and to God.

They tell us more than of the life that is and of the true lives

of ourselves. They point and lead us to the better day that is to be. 'Tis not by argument of men that we believe the life that is to come. 'Tis when we see a good life pass beyond our sight that we are lured to faith in the eternal goodness, and we feel the certainty of heaven.

Most of us gathered here today have known and felt the touch of such a life, and see the truth of these great thoughts embodied in the personality of one whom we loved very dearly.

Of her it would not be hard to speak in simple illustration of our thought were it not that

“ Sometimes we must hold it half a sin
To put in words the things we feel ;
For words, like Nature, half reveal
And half conceal the Soul within.”

And yet I know 'twill help us all this morning to think upon her life. It was one freer from error than our own—stronger and better. This we all feel and know. And being thus, it stood between ourselves and Christ, and more than we have known, it drew us towards Him.

It was a very faithful life. As wife, as mother, and as friend, she loved and wrought so as to give the highest meaning to these sacred words.

The same was true of her discipleship. She lived and served as one who did it in a loved, and great, and holy cause.

The truth found for itself, in her, an open mind. Freed from the narrowness which marks so many earnest lives, she sought reality and truth. The spirit of intolerance is wont to consort with a zealous faith. But in her, faith was brave and sought the truth.

A character with all the beauty and the finer graces of a woman, withal was strong and energetic. As by her love she led us, so by her strength she guided.

It had the grace of symmetry. Combined with faithfulness to home was loyalty to church. No interest seemed to crowd the other out, but all fell to their proper part, and length, and breadth, and height were equal.

In contrast to our own uncertain flights and errant ways, she stood among us just as wise in counsel as she was faithful in her love, endowed with the rare gift of consecrated wisdom.

The highest of us never felt ourselves above her, yet the humblest of us called her by the name of friend.

Gifted with graces better than us all, they were never used for self-uplifting, but in the humblest service for the obscure but highest ends of life.

Better even than her strength upholding us, and than her guiding judgment, was the spirit of her love. Such things as malice, envy, and unkindness were an unknown tongue. Never rebuking for the errors that she saw so often, but always helping by approving words of all the good she tried to see.

And better than these all, our friend not only was herself, but gave herself, for us, in loving sacrifice and humble service.

These things were but the fruits of a religious heart and life. From early girlhood up through womanhood she lived a growing Christian. The life of this church, which I could wish that you would love as she did, is bound by cords of love and service, long and faithful, to her own.

Many of its offices of service had the earlier and later guidance of her strong and loving hand. But she was more than this. She imparted to us all a spirit.

Her love was unconfined by her environment. She blessed

by deeds of love and service the community in which she lived. The church, in whose name she thus ministered, is better loved and honored for her sake. Her heart went out beyond her race and kin, and reached to the farthest heathen lands.

Religion was not bound by formal observations. It was an atmosphere and life. She could, if any of us, worship anywhere. Yet she was always in her place, in health and weakness, storm and sunshine, at morning and again at evening, reverent in worship, intelligent in hearing, an inspiration to the minister who preached the truth sometimes more poorly than she lived it.

To you and me she was both guide and counselor, as well as loving friend, and she never led us wrong.

While others slumbered in their unused strength, she wrought in physical weakness and with uncomplaining zeal. And thus she prayed and served, supporting by her strength and guiding by her wisdom.

Uniting many human contrasts into harmony: the affection of a friend with a true woman's dignity; reverent faith with the thoughtfulness of an intelligent and open mind; love with wisdom and grace with strength.

We all felt very helpless when she left us, and we thought,

"So many worlds, so much to do,
So little done, such things to be,
How know I what had need of thee,
For thou wert strong as thou wert true?"

But better shall we think and say,

"The shade by which my life was crost,
Which makes a desert in the mind,
Has made *me* kindly with my kind,
And like to her whose sight is lost."

I do not think the place that's left some one of you can fill. But I have prayed, and I have seen it being answered, that her good spirit may incite the many of you who loved her, and who leaned upon her, to together do the work that's left you.

Some here today could love her better than us all because the element of time was longer and the element of space was less, and into their experience those who loved her at a greater distance would not seek to enter with intruding step. May they be led away into the light to which her spirit leads, and feel,

"Yet less of sorrow lives in me
For days of happy commune dead;
Less yearning for the friendship fled,
Than some strong bond that is to be."

Thus far I've sought to speak the feelings of us all. But I cannot forbear to add the personal touch of gratitude and love. For three years she has brought into the varied and contrasting life of a young and erring ministry the elements of courage, hope, and inspiration. To be her pastor was a very sacred privilege. Her advice has guided, her faithfulness upheld, and her love has many times inspired, both in those hours and experiences of joy of which you know, and in those times of darkness and of disappointment which you seldom know or see.

A very helpful life has been with us and now has left us. I pray with you this morning that its spirit may not leave us, but may stay, with the picture of her Christlike life, to rebuke our unkind and unloving spirits, to strengthen our weak hearts and lives, to inspire us still by its example, and thus to lead us now in this life to its own goodness, and lead us onward through the shadows to a better light and life beyond.

Our Father in heaven. We thank Thee for the sacred loves and these affections of our life which lift us to Thyself and make us better.

We thank Thee that the spirit does not leave us, and we pray that something of the life we loved may be in all of us.

May we do more than mourn, and may we follow to the day beyond our present night, where we shall find again the loves that made our earthly heaven here. Amen.

(From The Congregationalist of March 7, 1903.)

MARTHA JEWELL CROMBIE.

Martha Jewell Crombie, the wife of Deacon Albert D. Crombie, and a deaconess of the Maplewood Congregational Church, passed away in her sixty-second year, from her earthly home in Malden, Mass., to the place prepared for her, February 19, 1903, after an illness of a little over a week, with pneumonia.

Mrs. Crombie was born of Asahel L. and Mary (Atherton) Jewell, at Winchester, N. H., October 31, 1841. She was educated in her native town and afterward was graduated from the Connecticut Normal School at New Britain. Both before and after her normal education she taught for many years in the schools of Winchester and vicinity, her last service being with the Winchester high school.

She was married to Deacon Crombie, November 12, 1872, at Winchester, and, after a brief residence in Pennsylvania, came to Malden in 1874. Two children, Sylvia Greenwood (born 1873; died 1886) and Mabel Lucretia (born 1875; died 1886), awaited her on the other side, and one, Alberta Jewell (born 1878), remains to take up her work here. A step-daughter, with her husband, Mr. and Mrs. Henry H. Cummings, a granddaughter, Esther Cummings, and the husband of over thirty years, completed the home which her spirit guided.

As a teacher she was always successful and popular. During her young womanhood she united with the Winchester Congregational Church, where she had assisted in the choir from girlhood, and became a teacher in the Sunday school.

The life of the Maplewood church is inseparably bound with hers. She came to the community the year the church was organized, and united with it soon after. She was identified with its early struggles, its varying fortunes, and its later growth. She had charge of the primary

department of the Sunday school for several years, and also gave long and faithful service as the president of the Ladies' Social Union and the Missionary Auxiliary and as a deaconess.

But her work and influence were not confined to her official duties. She imparted a spirit to the church, was earnest and devoted in all its interests and in the larger work of her denomination and all Christian service. Her interests were many, and her deeds of love and service were rendered throughout the community blessed by her life. New comers were visited by her and made at once to feel that they had a friend and neighbor. As wife, mother, and grandparent she graced an ideal home, in which religion was an atmosphere.

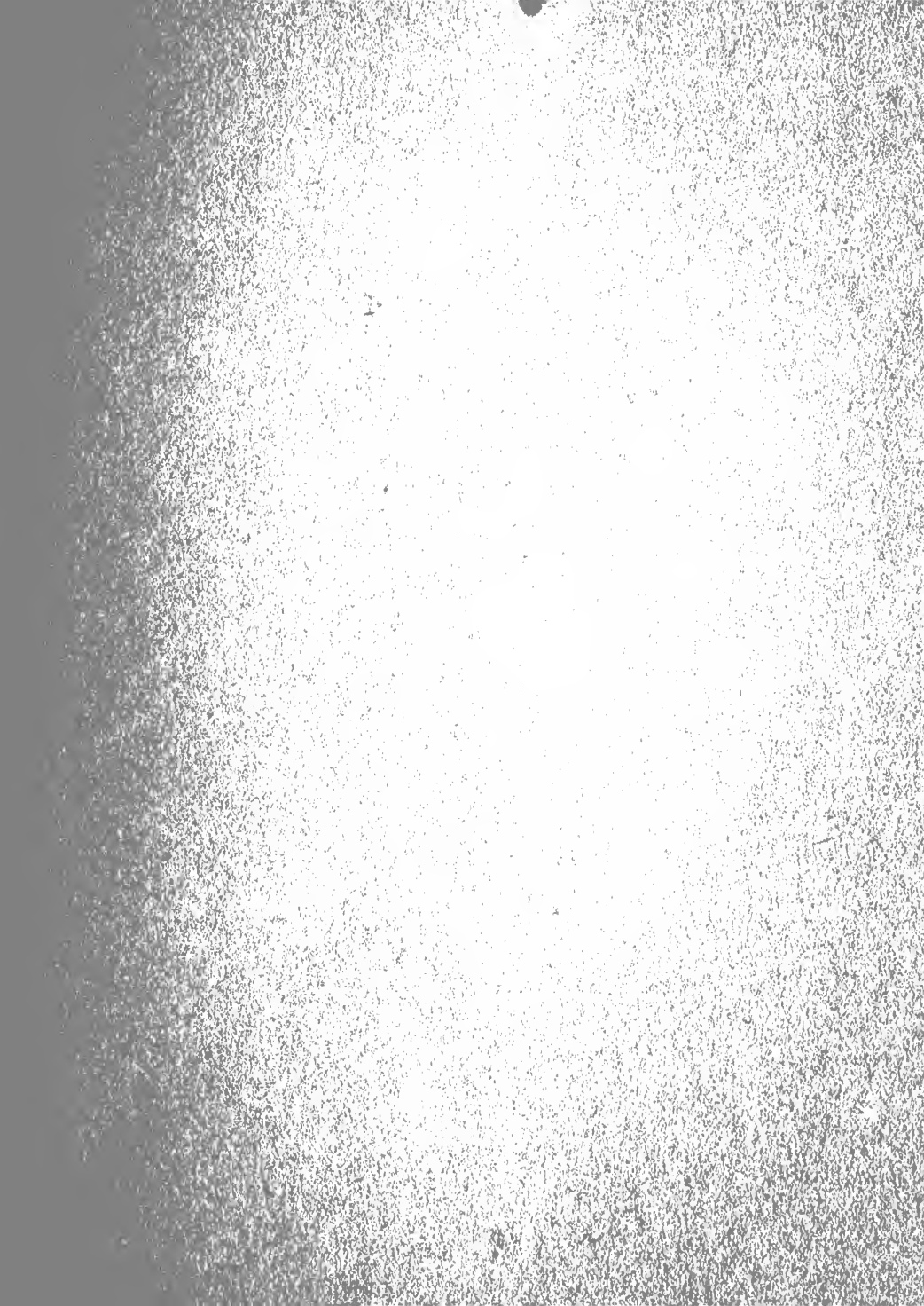
She was always in her place at church, in health and in weakness, in storm and in sunshine, on Sunday evening as well as Sunday morning, a reverent worshiper and intelligent listener, inspiring her minister.

Among the women and to her pastor she was guide and counselor as well as an affectionate friend. Much of the time in physical weakness, always uncomplainingly borne, she not only prayed and served, but led by her example, supported by her strength, and inspired to service by her life. United with an affectionate friendliness was womanly dignity; with reverent faith, a deep, intellectual earnestness and open-mindedness to all truth; with a kind and loving heart and unflinching devotion, the divine gift of an unerring wisdom.

While she leaves a large place that cannot be filled by another, she has left a spirit that will incite the church that loved her to try to do the work she laid down for her sake. She was a disciple in the church of Jesus Christ who made the Christian ministry, with all its disappointments, a great joy. To be her pastor was a sacred privilege. She gave inspiration to the message of the gospel by showing to minister, church, and world how beautiful, how Christlike, a human life may be when filled with the love of God in Jesus Christ.

C. S. M.





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